

Sixty Million Headaches Every Year

By HENRY F. and KATHARINE PRINGLE

Here are some of the nutty problems the telephone-directory people face: Shall they co-operate with Zeke ("Call me up, Toots—last name in the book") Zzzpt? Is Aaaaaron a real name? And how do you spell Wolfeschlegelsteinhausenbergerdorff?

THE 60,000,000 telephone directories which are distributed about once a year to the farms, villages and cities of this broad and talkative land are accepted as routine necessities. But the busy men and women who compile, edit and produce them have innumerable minor and major troubles, not necessarily routine ones.

Among their lesser troubles once were rats at some of the printing plants, with voracious appetites for the glue which holds the volumes together. The telephone-book people solved that one simply, by devising an adhesive which is distasteful to the larger rodents. Mice, for some reason, didn't seem to fancy either the glue or the paper.

More troublesome problems are posed by the astonishing number of telephone subscribers who yearn to be listed either first or last in their home-town books and who will go to considerable lengths to achieve their dubious purpose. In the absence of any hard-and-fast national alphabetical policy, the individual telephone companies are sometimes stumped by the ingenuity of the customers. The bulky Chicago directory has for some years started with an outfit called A Basement Waterproof, of 30 N. Dearborn. By legally adopting this name, the company has outmaneuvered the American Automobile Association and all other contestants for first place. The AAA is the initial entry in a large number of books.

A fair percentage of the first and final listings are names as genuine as sterling silver. Zznar, Thomas, closes the Chicago directory with the name he was born with. Yet the amiable telephone companies of the Bell System often regard it as a public service to print synthetic names, too—within reason. Competition for the No. 1 listing is so fierce in some localities that strict ground rules have had to be applied. When a subscriber in a Southern city demanded top billing with the name of Aaaaaron, his request was turned down because he could not produce proof that he was entitled to more than two of those five a's.

Last place is less bitterly fought for. Accordingly, in Los Angeles the telephone company is glad to accept an extra quarter a month—charges for additional listings range from twenty-five to fifty cents—from a salesman who wants to be recorded both under his real name and as Zzyzz, Ricardo. Most of the Bell companies incline to be broad-minded about such harmless eccentricities; they believe ardently in pleasing the subscriber. In the New York Manhattan directory the terminal listing is, so help us, the Zyzzy Ztamp Ztudioz. Presumably people buy ztampz from thiz ztore.

Such characters seem to have a conviction that they are easier to locate. In Detroit, for instance, a group of gay bachelors sharing an apartment asked

to have their common telephone number entered in the imaginary name of Zeke Zzzpt. Their idea, if it can be so dignified, was that this would make things simpler after an evening date.

"Call me up, Toots," one of the young blades would say. "I'm a cinch to find. Very last name in the book."

Whether the zany scheme works or not must be left to speculation. None of the telephone companies admits liability for distortions, omissions, broken romances or mistakes.

Yet directory executives from Boston to San Francisco make accuracy their primary goal, and they swell with pride at the records they achieve. Telephone books, they claim, are 99.91 per cent accurate despite the countless opportunities for error. The directory managers are not wholly happy, even so—possibly because of the screams of anguish which may arise when a name is misspelled or an incorrect address or number printed. They spend months training the girls who take service orders to beware the pitfalls in such names as Katherine Coffee (or Kathryn Koffey, Catharine Coughy or Kathrine Kauphie). A degree of self-flagellation marks the attitude of the Bell System men. While striving for the impossible record of 100 per cent, they insist on counting mistakes which are palpably the fault of a careless subscriber.

Next to accurate listings, the problem that causes the most lost sleep among the telephone people in the largest American cities is the size of their books. It is convenience to the customer rather than printing expense that concerns them. Few, if any, Bell executives can do more than guess at the per-book cost of a directory, so numerous are the departments involved in its production. The salaries of business-office clerks, technicians and distributors must be charged against the total—quite apart from the printer's bill.

However, they estimate that the cost of publishing and delivering a directory the size of a Manhattan book is approximately \$1.50. The cost of providing the same directory to an out-of-town subscriber can run almost as high as a dollar extra. The expenses of putting out the huge volumes are hidden in the subscribers' monthly bills, anyway, and few users are aware of them.

The headache is bulk. Lee Jordan, in charge of directory operations for the New York Telephone Company, has an exhibit in his office to which he points with decorous horror. For some years separate books have had to be published for the five boroughs of greater New York City; Mr. Jordan's showpiece is a projection, based on scientific estimates, of the 1975 Manhattan directory alone. It will be more than five inches thick, as compared with less than three

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She holds the huge Manhattan book, which, it is predicted, will be nearly twice as big by 1975.



William Kantor's Zyzzy Ztamp Ztudioz is listed last—on page 1858—of the Manhattan directory.



Janice Miller compares the first phone book published in New York with directories used today.

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SIXTY MILLION HEADACHES EVERY YEAR

(Continued from Page 27)

inches for the current book, unless the company finds some way of reducing it.

The mechanical difficulties of printing and binding such a tome are not insuperable. The country's really big presses could do the job. What worries Mr. Jordan and his colleagues is the effect such a combination of thickness and weight will have on the subscriber. They have visions of some elderly Aunt Mehitabel being unable to lift the book or, even worse, dropping it on her foot. Perhaps it could be split—A to L and M to Z. The directories of London, England, are so divided. But that would add another volume to the already too numerous New York City collection. Mr. Jordan is not alone in his woes. Chicago's directory has 2139 pages, not including the separate suburban issues. Philadelphia's also is mammoth.

The use of type smaller than the especially designed Bell Gothic, which now appears in almost all directories, would bring emphatic protests. Mr. Jordan reminds himself mournfully of the statistical fact that the oldsters in the nation's population are increasing. Some opticians might also complain, as it is fairly standard practice to use telephone-book type in tests for reading vision. At one time consideration was given to the possibility of supplying a magnifying glass with each book, and lenses were actually designed. But the notion was abandoned because of the probability that the glasses would be mislaid in most homes and almost certainly stolen from public booths.

Thinner papers might provide a solution, but their use might shorten the lives of books, which have, at best, a limited expectancy. Otherwise civilized people have a deplorable habit of tearing out pages at booths and in hotel rooms instead of copying down the numbers. A staff of inspectors roams such busy centers as railroad and bus stations to see if directory replacements are necessary. At New York's Grand Central Terminal fresh books are required every forty-eight hours. And nothing much can be done to stop people from tearing pages out of the directories for use as confetti when a parade is staged for some returning hero. A record was chalked up on Gertrude Ederle's triumphant arrival to New York after she swam the English Channel in 1926. The shredded pages of 5000 directories were showered on her at a cost, in those inexpensive days, of a couple of thousand dollars. The New York Telephone Company, which had to supply new books, still shudders at the memory.

No immediate, practical answer has yet been found to the problem of growing bulk. The directory experts struggle to make each listing as brief as their considerable ingenuity permits. Any name, address and number which runs to two lines in the directory causes them acute pain. The cost of adding a second line to a listing in the Manhattan book is \$2.65. In addition, extra lines add to the size of the book. In their efforts to avoid the two-line peril, the Bell companies, aided by A.T.&T., have elevated abbreviation to a science. Most businesses and professions can be compressed to phys, chirpdst, delctsn, rel est or ch suey. First names become Wm, Chas, Jas, Edw, Geo and Thos, if the customer is willing.

A household phrase in the Bell family is "good overtones," which means that the companies are keenly aware of the value of public relations. They like to make the customer happy, and the pert little clerks in the business offices are carefully educated in the art. When a new subscriber spells out some lengthy handle, such as John Cholmondeley Peppercorn, the need for good overtones is great. Would he not be willing to appear as John C. Peppercorn, the clerk asks tactfully, or, better yet, as J. C. Peppercorn? Usually this approach works. If the customer is adamant, though, the directory compilers sigh and shoot the whole works. A friendly voice will call Mr. Peppercorn before the next issue goes to press, however, to ask whether he hasn't changed his mind.

Surnames, on the other hand, are never abbreviated. The directory editors could do nothing about a gentleman who appeared in the 1951 Altoona, Pennsylvania, book as Wolfeschlegelsteinhausenbergerdorff, Herbert B. They simply threw up their hands and printed this, the longest name on record. With his address and number, it took up three lines.

In Washington, D.C., and in other areas near Army and Navy installations, the local companies have additional difficulties in keeping listings to one line. This is because military personnel, whether of land, sea or air, cling fondly to their titles. A marine general no longer active still goes in as Brig Gen USMC Ret. Too much compression might cause top-brass hackles to rise, so a vice-admiral is not just an adm. He is identified with nautical precision as V Adm USN. A Staff Sgt USAF gets recognition, too, probably

on the sound theory that no more-important rank exists in the Air Force. The Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company, which serves the nation's capital and most of Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia, draws the line only at privates.

"You'll be at least a corporal before the new book is out," one of the "overtones" girls tells them, and the cajolery has always worked.

Addresses are also likely to spill over onto two lines, and here again Washington and its environs are among the worst offenders. Crowding by the typesetters helps. By leaving little or no space between numbers and names in addresses like 3318BuenaVistaTer and 4522LivngstnRd, thousands of tons of white paper can be saved. But it is hardly possible to cut OldBladnsbrgRd Sil Spg (translation: Old Bladensburg Road, Silver Spring, Maryland) very much more.

The C&PTelCo—the company will accept checks so drawn, proving that it practices as well as preaches—has learned that there is such a thing as compressing too much. A resident of Glen Hills, Maryland, protested not long ago that his friends, reading his abbreviated address hastily were accusing him of living in Gin Hills. In the new directory the name was spelled out in full.

It must not be supposed, from this incident, that the C&PTelCo bows meekly to prohibitionist sentiment; it merely wants to give satisfactory service. Near Laurel, Maryland, is a country lane long known, for reasons lost in history, as Whisky Bottom Road. Only a score of telephone subscribers live there. Half of them found the name objectionable and wanted it changed to



The Perfect Squelch

THE young secretary was a hard worker and anxious to make good, but she had a grouchy boss whom nothing could please. For months, she suffered in silence under his constant criticism. Then, as might be expected, she found herself another job. Her boss received the news with incredulity.

"Why, young woman," he said, "your work is just beginning to show the results of months of careful training. I took a lot of

trouble with you. And now you're leaving."

The boss paused, waiting for the girl to make some apologetic remark. Hearing none, he talked as though she couldn't possibly succeed elsewhere.

"Remember that if you ever need a job," he concluded, "you can always apply here."

"If I ever come back here," the girl replied gently, "I certainly will be in need of a job."

—GRACE NORCROSS.



Patuxent Drive. The other half stood firmly for tradition; they had always dwelt on Whisky Bottom Road, they declared loudly, and there they would live and die. The C&PTelCo extricated itself neatly from this dilemma. It offered to list the subscriber's address either way. Let those who preferred Patuxent Drive choose it, and the rest could remain linked with the demon rum.

The justifiable desire of the telephone companies to cut down on two-line directory listings explains why postal-zone numbers are not included. Whenever a new postmaster takes office in a city, he wants to know if zone numbers cannot be printed with subscribers' addresses. The answer is always the same. Adding the zone number would require three or four additional type spaces. Instead, most companies publish a map of the postal zones in the Classified directory, or yellow pages, along with a full page devoted to mailing rates and regulations. The sad truth anyway, as Bell executives are likely to point out, is that only a fraction of all mail is addressed with the zone number.

Things are difficult enough without zone numbers. A vital part of every directory system, though unseen by the telephone user, is the information service. This is an essential adjunct of all exchanges, small or huge. The day when a subscriber asked the operator to "get me Bill Jones; I think he's down to the sawmill" is as extinct as the whalebone corset and the mustache cup. Yet even now the contrast between the quasi-rural office and the metropolitan one is vivid.

Consider the office in Barbara Fritchie's home town, Frederick, Maryland. Although it is relatively small, its dial equipment is as modern as any in the land. It serves an area in a radius of ten miles or more from the city limits. Two pretty girls take care of all the information queries; new numbers, which are filed beside them in a rotary card index, normally reach them within an hour of the time a new phone is installed. Unlike metropolitan customers, people in a small community have the habit of looking numbers up in the directory before they ask Information. If too many of them get lazy, the Frederick office launches a gentle but firm re-education campaign. "That's in the book," Information will say sweetly.

In the vast cities like Philadelphia, Chicago and New York, despite ener-

getic propaganda by the telephone companies, requests for already-published numbers are in the majority. Manhattan Island alone has five information exchanges; at each one some 90,000 queries a day are received in automatic rotation by long rows of operators. The girls sit in glass-partitioned booths, surrounded by borough and suburban directories. Close at hand is the printed daily addendum of 500 or so new numbers, which comes to the information operators about twenty-four hours after the phones have gone into service.

More than 70 per cent of the requests in Manhattan are for numbers which could have been found in the directory. An A.T.&T. official thinks the unwieldy book is to blame. He blames, too, the discouragingly large number of people in New York who are named Brown, Smith, Cohen, Jones or Levy. It's easier just to ask Information. The listener who plugs in on one of the operators cannot help being amazed at their patience and good nature. They reach first for the current directory, and they never remind the customer that he might have saved their time and his own by looking up the number. One of the information girls was asked recently whether, toward the end of a hard day, she did not blow her top and snarl, "It's in the book, you lug!"

She looked scandalized, then grinned. "I never do, of course," she said, "but I have been tempted."

Between the rows of operators roam experienced supervisors who can connect their headphones to any of the boards if the girls are baffled. They must wrestle with, among other things, people who do not speak English very well or who have pronounced foreign accents. One day a youthful operator appealed despairingly to her superior.

"It sounds as if this party wants the Hook and Eye Dental Clinic," she said in bewilderment. "I can't find anything like that."

The supervisor's interpretation was prompt. "It may sound like Hook and Eye," she conceded. "But what he wants is the Guggenheim Dental Clinic."

Another factor which complicates the directory-and-information business is private numbers. Many prominent people have valid reasons for not wanting to be in the book. They can be, and are, called at all hours of the day and night by salesmen and eccentrics. The telephone companies will comply with

anybody's request for an unpublished number, though reluctantly. Unlisted subscribers, for one thing, add to the volume of information calls. Such a number is really private; it is not listed with Information. Only in a grave emergency will an exchange ring it to ask whether the caller should be connected.

As a warning to people who find a certain snobbish satisfaction in private numbers, directory executives tell the sad story of a young man we'll call Elbert Harrow, who lived in a Midwestern city. He insisted on an anonymous telephone and forgot his number within hours after the installation. Toward evening, after asking some office associates to drop in at his house for cocktails, he wanted to notify his houseboy that they were coming. So he dialed Information.

"I'm Elbert Harrow," he explained. "I want to call my home, but I can't remember the number."

"Sor-ry," droned the girl. "That is a private number."

"But I'm Elbert Harrow," he pleaded, "and it's my number."

"I am sorry, sir; we are not allowed to give out the number."

All big cities have such inaccessible subscribers; there are probably more of them in the Hollywood movie colony than anywhere else. Furtive peddlers used to hawk lists of "private numbers of the stars" along Wilshire Boulevard on the way to Santa Monica or Brentwood Heights. Recently Miss Joan Crawford was asked about the authenticity of these lists.

"I think that people did what I did and changed their numbers so frequently that they couldn't have been accurate," Miss Crawford replied. "I have solved the whole problem, however. I have a wonderful exchange service where efficient operators take the calls and relay them to my secretary."

The telephone companies can do little about the inadvertent inclusion in the book of shady characters of either sex. The names of many a bookmaker and fancy lady have appeared in almost every large directory—at least temporarily. But detective work is hardly a proper part of any communications system, and the companies cannot refuse or discontinue service until there has been a conviction in the courts. Meanwhile—unless they have been so naïve as to admit their real occupations to a telephone representative—Joe Horsetrack and Miss O'Verne LaTorch are listed like anybody else. The information operator will give out their numbers, but not their professions, because she hasn't the faintest idea what they are.

The Bell System information services are by no means limited to telephone queries. During World War II the New York Telephone Company received letters daily from servicemen in nearby camps who were about to visit the city on leave and wanted the telephone numbers of girls they had met, so they could make dates in advance. A Medical Corps major in an evacuation hospital in France wrote for a Manhattan book, explaining that some of his young officers had become acquainted with girls while in training at St. Luke's Hospital and wanted to correspond with them. The directory was sent at once, and the major reported that it was soon worn dog-eared.

A more poignant communication was received by New York's former Mayor Impellitteri and forwarded to the A.T.&T. It was written by a young

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CLIP THIS TO YOUR BUSINESS LETTERHEAD

Cuban, whom we shall call Juan Perez, after a visit to New York. His girl in Havana had asked him to bring back, as a present, a Manhattan directory. Juan had paid four dollars for the book and then had lost it. His lament continued:

She don't believe me. You know the women! She thinks I forgot to fetch the directory. She don't believe I spent \$4.00 dollars in a woman whim.

Oh who invented girls?

Will you be so kind as to sending me a phone directory? I am in love. I don't want lost her. When you was a boy, sure you was in trouble for a girl and perhaps somebody help you then. Tomorrow I will help some boy. We are only the strong sex, but they are the fair sex. What a sex!

Will you? Thanks a million.

Let no one accuse the great A.T.&T. of being a heartless corporation. Juan received a free directory in short order. In paying four dollars for his mislaid copy he had been taken by city slickers, however. The Bell System has price lists of directories published in the United States, Canada, Algeria, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, the Belgian Congo and Rhodesia—as well as India, Germany, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Norway, Mexico and France. Torn as he was by love, Señor Perez should still have obtained a Manhattan book for the current price of two dollars. Any telephone user can get instructions for procuring any out-of-town or foreign book by calling his local business office. If the people there don't know the price, they will quickly find out.

International telephony has obviously added to the problems of A.T.&T. and its affiliates. Seventy-five years ago their lives were simple. The first directories were published in 1878 in New Haven and New York, in so far as diligent research has revealed. They were of one page each and were actually classified books, although the term had not yet been devised. Subscribers were listed under such headings as Physicians, Dentists, Stores, Factories, Stables and Residences. In the first Philadelphia directory, residential telephones were described as "social." No numbers or addresses were given, for the good reason that they were not needed.

These prehistoric directories, now carefully preserved, are interesting for their omissions. Yale University does not appear on the original New Haven list, doubtless because the conservative Elis could not believe that the telephone was here to stay. Only a few of the early New York subscribers are familiar. The Bradstreet Company, 249 Broadway, was among the pioneers. So was D. Appleton & Company, publishers. Hotels with telephone service way back then included the Windsor, the Albermarle and the now-doomed Brevoort. Le Boutillier & Bros. was in the directory—today it is Best & Co.—and so was James McCreery & Co. But Drexel, Morgan & Company, of which the elder J. P. Morgan had become a partner seven years before, had not yet accepted the new means of communication.

In a Chicago directory printed at about the same time, the Adams Express Company is one of the few familiar names. But Chicago had a separate classified list even in those first years. Under BASEBALL SUPPLIES appears A.G. Spaulding & Brothers—it was so spelled then—and under REAPERS, C. H. & L. McCormick.

Then, as today, telephone books carried instructions for the proper use of the instruments. The Chicago company directed subscribers:

When you are called from the Central Office, answer by ringing your bell the same number of times as your call, i.e., if your call is three, answer three; then turn the switch to the right and use your telephone. Speak clearly and distinctly, with your lips gently TOUCHING the telephone.

Instructions for use are less involved today, but they are still quite specific. The summer, 1953, directory for Cascade, Montana, lists only 182 names, but a word of warning inside the cover indicates that men are still men in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains:

Profane or obscene language over the company's wires is prohibited. . . . Failure to observe this will constitute cause for discontinuing service.

This admonition used to be standard in practically all directories in the days before dial exchanges, when, sad to relate, rough language was sometimes directed at the poor operator. If any profanity is indulged in by members of the telephone family themselves—and the possibility is most unlikely—it doesn't come from the operators. It might come, though, from the lips of the thousands of harried specialists who compile, print, proofread and distribute the 60,000,000 and more books each year.

Rather surprisingly, there are few major mechanical problems involved even in printing the very large volumes, so great have been the advances in the publishing industry in the past fifty years.

"Getting out directories is pick-and-shovel work," according to N. J. VanderKloot, vice-president of the sprawling R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company on the south side of Chicago. His company prints a total of 1340 different directories for the Bell and independent companies, in Chicago and at a second plant in Crawfordsville, Indiana. They include the directories for Chicago,

Detroit, Cleveland, St. Louis and Denver, as well as for hundreds of other communities.

The jobs may be in the pick-and-shovel class, yet only nine of the country's print shops are prepared to handle any large number of them. Approximately thirty more printers take on, in the main, lesser directories in their own localities. Costly presses and folding machines are required for telephone-book work, and the printer's problem is to find work for this equipment between major assignments.

The two biggest directory printers are Donnelley and the Jersey City Printing Company, in New Jersey. Their tasks, and those of the telephone companies, would be a lot easier if people didn't get married or divorced, move or die. They would be simplicity itself if there were only a few new subscribers. The intricate process by which a subscriber's name makes its way into the book starts when he appears at a business office or calls it. His name, address and occupation are carefully set down, in printed letters instead of script, to minimize mistakes.

In all the big-city offices, a battery of machines transmits to the printer the new names and numbers, the changes and the cancellations of service. These are set into Bell Gothic type, laboriously and repeatedly proofread by both the printer and the telephone company. The resulting daily addenda are rushed by truck or train in order to reach the information girls early in the morning. Once a month, usually, all the changes are worked into a bound reprint for the use of the information exchanges, and after several months and additional checking and proofreading, this becomes the new directory for the public.

The national bill for telephone books comes to more than \$40,000,000 annu-

ally. Most companies print in their directories a statement declaring that they are not liable for errors, and they have generally been upheld in the courts, on the ground that financial loss has not been proved. Litigation has been frequent, however. Typical was the case of a Delaware dentist who brought suit because he was incorrectly listed. The court ruled that the mistake was not malicious, and all he received was a rebate on his bill. In this and in other cases, the telephone companies have been found innocent of any nasty or wicked intent. But the management feels deeply grieved by such mistakes and will go to any reasonable lengths to rectify them. If a name has been left out, all the subscriber has to do is furnish a list of names, and the company will mail post cards calling attention to the fact. Or, if the subscriber prefers, the phone company will give him the post cards to mail himself.

The final step in the directory process is, of course, delivering the new books. In a large city, distribution may take as long as three weeks; only a few days are needed for small communities. Rural areas can present difficulties; it is not always easy to find delivery men who know where the farm subscribers are located. One company faced with this problem engaged several R.F.D. carriers to do the job in their off hours. One of them held out for a higher price, so the company put the books in the mail. The chagrined route man had to do the job for nothing.

At the same time the new telephone books are distributed, the old ones are collected. The chief aim is to get obsolete volumes out of use, thereby avoiding wrong numbers and an additional load on Information. During the acute paper shortage of World War II, the old directories brought in pleasant sums when they were sold to scrap dealers and others. They are still often worth selling. Not long ago several thousand thick Manhattan books were shipped to a Central American banana firm, which used them to bulletproof its payroll trucks.

The out-of-date directories are gathered up as quickly as possible and quickly got rid of—sometimes too quickly. For customers occasionally use telephone books as repositories for money or valuable papers. Among the articles left in old directories have been wedding certificates, stamp collections, war bonds—and cash.

A New England storekeeper once tucked his Saturday receipts of \$1500 into a book, which was carried off on Monday, before he had time to extract his money. The telephone company told him he was welcome to examine the 100,000 volumes waiting to be carted away. He enlisted the aid of his wife, his sister, his brother-in-law and two nephews. They found the \$1500 at the end of three days and 75,000 books.

On another occasion a girl answering a call in a telephone-company business office heard a frantic male voice. "I wrote the combination of my safe on Page 273 of my directory," he almost howled, "and your people took it away while I was out."

Here, if ever, was a case for good overtones. The young lady made a check and found that almost 250,000 outworn books had been accumulated. But she rose to the emergency and called the subscriber back. "Why don't you have the safe combination changed?" she suggested.

He had not thought of that, and he had it done.

THE END

Ted Williams Speaks His Mind



The most outspoken man in sports is going to speak his piece in the Post. Starting next week, Ted Williams reveals his plans for the future—plans that will surprise millions. He tells what he thinks about today's baseball stars and managers. He names the greatest shortstop he ever saw, the best right-handed power hitter, and "the greatest pitcher of my time." For good measure, he tells you what he thinks of night baseball, bleacher crowds—and sports writers! You can begin this frank and lively feature . . .

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